

# Record

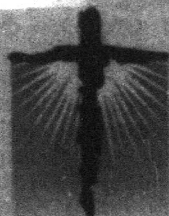
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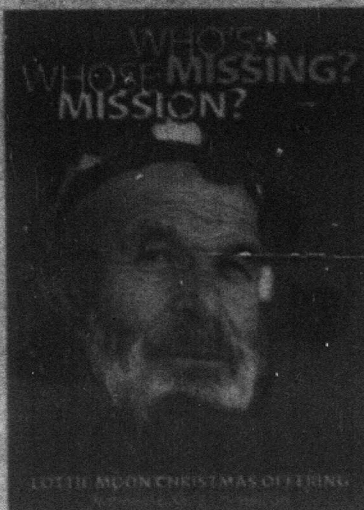
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MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS



## Missionaries stalled for lack of funds

RICHMOND, Va. (BP and local reports) — Jodi Nichols cries when she talks about it. Her husband Kevin says he would rather be hit with a baseball bat.

The couple from Wheeler, located between Baldwin and Booneville in northeast Mississippi, committed their lives to missions nearly two years ago. They planned to move to Russia with their four children in January, but in the midst of a rocky economy and shortfalls in missions giving, they won't be going anytime soon.

"It hurt," says Kevin of the day he, his wife, and about 200 others also called to missions learned that Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) did not have the funds to send them.

"Today it still doesn't feel real... I know what God has called us to... [but] it takes money," he says.

For now, the Nicholoses are uncertain when — or if — they will be able to go to the mission field. By the time the economy rebounds, their oldest child may be 15 or 16, and IMB discourages the appointment of families with children that old.

The Nichols family's situation is a snapshot of how a struggling economy impacts lives — both here and around the globe. Because the Nicholoses can't go, someone in Russia may not hear the Gospel.

### Global problem

In Asian countries such as South Korea, a sluggish U.S. economy means fewer sales and less money for local goods. It also means that in one of the largest missionary-sending countries in the world, fewer South Korean missionaries will have enough funds.

"The South Korean market kind of mirrors the U.S. market, but double the effects," says John (name changed for security reasons), a missionary who handled finances in South Korea for four years before recently moving with his family to Thailand.

"As the U.S. market kind of tanked, [South Korea] lost about half of [its] buying power," he adds. "They are extremely dependent upon the U.S. imports of their Asian goods."

South Koreans also are heavily involved in missions, with more than 17,000 Korean Protestant missionaries currently serving worldwide.

"They're probably our biggest [missions] ally worldwide," John notes. "The weakening of the Korean won [currency] has impacted their ability to function outside Korea. As a missionary-sending country, they are really feeling it."

Other countries around the globe are "feeling it" as well. The U.S. unemployment rate stands at more than 10% and is continuing to climb. As staggering as that seems, unemployment in Zimbabwe hovers around 90%. Statistics from the International Labor Organization show the number of unemployed could jump to 239 million internationally by the end of 2009.

There also is the issue of the dollar. Last year, it took \$1.62 to equal one euro. This month, the value is around \$1.49 after improving briefly to \$1.25 earlier this year.



STILL WAITING — Kevin and Jodi Nichols of Wheeler had planned to be in Russia next year sharing the Gospel as International Mission Board missionaries, but reduced missions giving has their plans on hold indefinitely. They and their four children moved into a mobile home to ride out the transition. (BP photo)

"The dollar has gained some strength," IMB treasurer David Stevenson says, "but while we are better off than we were a year ago, we are not nearly as good as we were [as recently as several months ago]."

### 'Difficult to live'

Mike and Jan Bennett have worked in Venezuela for more than 10 years. Even doing simple things, they say, can be a major expense. When inflation rose to 26%, two combo meals at McDonald's cost \$35.

"The economic crisis is affecting every country in the world," Bennett says. "It makes it very difficult to live on the field when the prices continue to go up."

In past years, Bennett says, missionaries have been unhappy about the lack of funds to buy Bibles or other ministry materials, "but the truth of the matter is that this is a far more serious problem. The critical need is just having [missionaries] here to do the work."

The lack of workers also is jeopardizing the future of a significant ministry in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims who live and work in Europe board ferries every summer to return home to North Africa to visit family. However, an effort that puts Bibles and ministry materials into the immigrants' hands as their cars pass through a European city's port gates may fall by the wayside.

Approximately 200 Southern Baptists help with the ministry each summer. Because of last year's shortfall in Southern Baptists' Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, many short-term missionaries who coordinate the efforts will not be able to extend their terms.

One missionary says the program won't be able to continue without them — or replacements. "The project is in danger if we are not able to replace personnel," says

Dave Webber (name changed for security purposes), who leads the effort in the European country, where there are believed to be more than five million Muslims.

Last year, teams distributed 26,000 Gospel packets at the port gates. "That means 26,000 families received the Gospel," he says. "What if we're not there at the gates? You can't print this stuff in many parts in Algeria" where distributing Bibles is illegal.

"I think about this [economic] slowdown and the tough things that are going on around the world financially and in the United States... but what if we're not there at the opportunities the Lord has given us?"

### Hard times at home

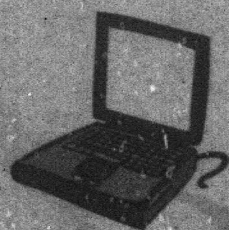
Parkridge Church in Coral Springs, Fla., has sent teams in the past to help with the outreach in the European country, but like many churches and ministries worldwide they also are experiencing their share of financial challenges.

"It's a hard time," says pastor Eddie Bevil, who started the church 17 years ago. "Our offerings haven't grown much in the last year. We raised our mission challenge but reduced our general operating budget. No one got raises, but we didn't have to let anybody go."

To avoid staff layoffs, the church reduced its Cooperative Program (CP) giving to a month-by-month basis. Nearly half the funding for missions comes through CP, which supports state efforts as well as IMB and North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"If it comes we'll give it," Bevil says. "If it doesn't come we can't... and that's a terrible way to support the Cooperative Program. Older pastors around the country would kick me, I'm sure, for doing that."





## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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# A symbol of our own

Symbols are powerful objects to people, and always have been. From the beginnings of human history, when people piled stones one upon the other to mark significant places and events, to the Colossus of Rhodes, to the World Trade Towers, symbols compel us to remember the past, move us to action in the present, and give us hope for a bright future.

Great movements have almost always included important symbols. Who can forget Lady Liberty in Tiananmen Square, or our own Statue of Liberty on which Lady Liberty was based? The Great Seal of the United States, with its bald eagle clutching among its talons both arrows for war and olive branches for peace, is recognized all over the world. (A trivia question: In which direction does the eagle's head face? Answer: To the right toward the olive branches, to symbolize the nation's preference for peace.)

Symbols have of course been misused through the ages, too. The swastika, for over 3,000 years the symbol of good luck in many cultures around the world, was adopted by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in the 1930s to capture the essence of their ruinous march toward war and mass murder. It has never recovered its original meaning.

Christians have their symbols, too, the most consequential being the cross upon which our Lord and Savior died to save each one of us. Scholars and other folks have argued for many years (and continue to do so) over the exact composition and configuration of the cross, but its influence and meaning to billions of people over the past 2,000 years is not arguable.



**Lottie Moon**

If Southern Baptists have a symbol to call our own, it would be the image of Lottie Moon and the ideals she embodied. One of the first Southern Baptist missionaries to be commissioned to China in 1873, her passion for helping bring lost souls to salvation in that country is legendary even to non-Southern Baptist Christians.

Lottie lived among the Chinese people for 40 years. She was known far and wide, by both friend and foe alike, as the Heavenly Book Visitor because of her unshakable faith in and firm reliance

upon the Bible. She loved the Chinese people with all her heart — especially the women and children.

She loved them so much that, when the time came, she was willing to lay down her life for them. Famine came to China, and she was so committed to the people that she gave away all her money and food so others could eat. Finally, on a ship in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, that was returning her to America, she died of malnutrition on Christmas Eve of 1912. She weighed 50 pounds.

The world little noted her life and passing, but Southern Baptists have never forgotten her. Her spiritual passion and personal sacrifice for the cause of Christ have come to symbolize our dedication to helping fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Her selflessness epitomizes for us the image of Christ in ourselves, and calls us to be as single-minded as Lottie when it comes to the prospect of helping to bring the world to Jesus.

It is fitting that Lottie Moon has become such a powerful symbol for Southern Baptists. She dedicated her life to others and eventually died for them. How much closer to the model of Jesus could any one of us get?

As the December emphasis for this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions approaches the midway point and we all seek the Lord's guidance on the amount we will give, know that every penny of the offering goes directly to the field to support the Southern Baptists who are there, just as Lottie was there all those many years ago. Let us hold high the symbol of Lottie not only as we give of our resources, but as we also give of our lives to help save the world.

Most importantly, let us hold Jesus Christ highest of all. Lottie wouldn't want it any other way.

We have always thought of the Gospel as good news. In fact, the Greek word *evangelion*, which is translated Gospel, literally means "Good News," and certainly the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again to give us salvation and victory over sin is Good News, indeed!

However, for many people in the world, the Gospel will be bad news. They will discover that Jesus Christ is the standard of judgment for whether or not one receives salvation and enters into eternal life in heaven.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, ESV). The Apostle Paul testified of that day, "on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:16, ESV).

Many people, even in our own society, have heard the Gospel but have chosen not to believe and accept it. Some think their good works or faithful and perfunctory attendance at church will save them. Many humanistic thinkers in our postmodern society are convinced their own efforts, or whatever they chose to believe, are of equal value to faith in Jesus Christ.

Then there are those around the world who have been

## GUEST OPINION:



### Good News, or bad news?

By Jerry Rankin, president  
International Mission Board

exposed to the Gospel but choose to follow other religions. They are going to be terribly disillusioned one day to discover all roads do not lead to God; only the one through faith in the blood of Jesus can cleanse our sins.

However, the greatest tragedy is not found in the arrogant self-righteous or those who reject a Christian witness. It is found among those who have never heard the Good News that Jesus saves.

There are many in our own country, or neighborhood, who have never been confronted with a clear evangelistic witness of Christ.

Multitudes around the world live in pockets of lostness where they have never even heard the name of Jesus. They are likely to live their entire lives without an opportunity to hear, understand and respond to the life-changing message of God's redemptive love. For many, it is going to be quite disturbing to arrive at the judgment throne of God to find that faith in Jesus Christ is the only hope of salvation — and they didn't even have a chance to hear and believe!

Do we think they are satisfied to follow religious traditions that give no hope and assurance

of eternal life? Are they happy to be in bondage to legalistic rituals that do nothing to give them victory over sin and bring peace to their lives? Is lostness and dwelling in spiritual darkness a preferable choice to experiencing the grace of God and finding forgiveness of sin?

For them, the Gospel is bad news because it describes who joins God in His eternal Kingdom and who spends an eternity in hell.

Whose mission and responsibility is it to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples? Who has our Lord commissioned to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth? Every believer and every church.

What are we doing to make sure the Gospel is good news to the whole world? Will we pray for those without Christ? Will we give sacrificially that God-called missionaries can go and make disciples of all nations? Will we offer our lives to be used to take the Gospel to the remaining pockets of lostness that all people everywhere might know Jesus?

Rankin, a native of Clinton and Tupelo and graduate of Baptist-affiliated Mississippi College in Clinton, has announced his 2010 retirement as president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, Va.

WHO'S  
WHOSE MISSING?  
MISSION?

LOTTIE MOON  
CHRISTMAS OFFERING

THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD



# Jakarta neighborhoods underscore need

**JAKARTA, Indonesia (BP)** — Venture after dark into Jakarta's Grapes neighborhood (name changed for security reasons), and you might not live to see daylight.

When the sun goes down on this rowdy slum, families there take cover while criminals take to the streets. Gang-run nightclubs open for business. Prostitutes perch on barstools and stand in doorways. Liquor flows and drugs change hands. On especially lively nights, knives flash.

Mornings, however, belong to the kids. From the open windows of a formerly abandoned building, you can hear their voices — 30 or so children laugh, sing with their volunteer teachers, and work on learning activities. Their hand-drawn pictures adorn the walls of the little school. After finishing one last song, they give thanks to God and dig into plates of fruit before heading home.

All the families of Grapes are Muslim. Most are poor. Parents who have jobs tend to work for the clubs. Some send their children out to beg during the day. Odds are, none of these kids would attend school if this one didn't exist. Their parents can't afford school uniforms, much less books.

Here they pay what they can, but they pay something. The little school belongs to the community. In fact, government officials have recognized it as a model of community-based education. The children of Grapes now have at least a chance of advancing to more schooling.

"We started the school," says Lucinda Arroyo (name changed for security reasons), a Southern Baptist worker in Indonesia's capital city, "but they're the ones who fixed up the building, plugged the leaks and built the tables."

Indonesian sisters and college students Shirley and Ann (names changed for security reasons) love coming to teach at Grapes. "This activity has opened my eyes that there is another side of living in Jakarta," Shirley says. "Jesus blessed me so much. Why should I waste my time going to the mall? Why not help them? We want to show them that we, as Christians, care."

Christians caring about the families of Grapes began with basketball. Even that is typically beyond poor Jakarta youths, since organized leagues charge fees and such. Enter Lucinda, her husband Rick, and their ministry team. They offered to teach Grapes young people basketball basics, rent a court, and challenge local school squads to play games.

It took some doing. One basketball court owner raised rental fees twice; he didn't want slum kids practicing on his property. Grapes parents also were suspicious. "They thought we were going to steal their kids," Rick says.

That all changed when the Grapes kids actually beat one of the top school teams in the area. "It was like a movie," Rick recalls. "The kids were intimidated at first, but they ended up winning. The parents went crazy. That's how we started the school. They wanted something more, and by then we had made inroads in the community."

After classes, school workers visit families in their tiny homes along the alleyways. Rick stops to pay his respects at the home of the community leader, a tough character who did prison time for shooting a man. He welcomes Rick warmly. Despite his past, he looks after the interests of his people.

"The school is a big benefit here," the leader says. It represents a future and a hope for the children.

## Nehemiah as model

A future and a hope are keys to understanding why the Arroyos and their team care so much about a place no one else seems too concerned about. Grapes has become a laboratory of sorts for community ministry in Jakarta. The Arroyos believe the model can be adapted for lots of places in the sprawling urban area.

Communities need schools for their children. Adults want to learn English, which is often a ticket out of poverty. Other neighborhoods need relief from the chronic flooding that torments many parts of the city. A band of trash collectors wants to learn how to read. Families need counseling to deal with life challenges. Countless Jakartans need job skills.

"Community centers get us into neighborhoods," Rick explains. "They are bridges. People ask, 'Who are you? Why are you here? What can you do for me?' This gives you the right to share [your faith]. Through community centers, our national team can visit people in their homes, meet needs, and share the Gospel."

That's only one part of their overall vision for the city. It begins with round-the-clock prayer and massive distribution of God's Word throughout Jakarta. It culminates with the starting of cell churches — up to 24,000 of them, if the team's ambitious dream is realized.

That would put a cell group within reach of every group of 500 people in Jakarta, home to an estimated 12 million people. The greater metro region contains up to 20 million, according to some estimates.

For inspiration they look to Nehemiah, the humble cupbearer of Old Testament renown. If Nehemiah — a "regular guy" in Rick's words, not an engineer or great general — could organize the rebuilding of the pulverized wall around ancient Jerusalem in 52 days, they believe mod-



**BIG CHALLENGE** — The largest mosque in Southeast Asia dominates this view of Jakarta, capital of Indonesia. "Jakarta is a city of extremes," says a Southern Baptist worker. "You've got the extremely rich and the extremely poor, the top leaders and the illiterate, the most fanatical Islam and the most nominal. It's the most modern city and the most poverty-stricken." Up to 20 million people live in the greater metropolitan area. (BP photo)

ern-day followers of Christ can evangelize the city of Jakarta over a period of years.

Their vision: "Jakarta becomes a city of God, because there will be a true movement of God so that communities are changed and thousands of new believing fellowships started."

## Money, power, misery

The task goes beyond sheer numerical size. There's ethnic and cultural diversity: Han Chinese, Javanese, Sundanese, indigenous Betawi, and members of nearly all of the 300 distinct people groups of Indonesia. Ancient Hindu tradition still influences society, mingling with the Islam that has dominated the region since the 13th century.

More than 2,600 mosques and 5,800 Muslim prayer centers saturate the city, along with Buddhist and Hindu temples.

The latest fashions compete with body-covering Muslim burqas. Posh condos and 10-story malls sprout downtown, while monsoon floods ravage slums. Indonesia's money, power, and political influence flow through Jakarta, along with much of its human misery.

"Jakarta is a city of extremes," Rick says. "You've got the extremely rich and the extremely poor, the top leaders and the illiterate, the most fanatical Islam and the most nominal. It's the most modern city and the most poverty-stricken."

## Other challenges

• **Gridlock.** Getting across Jakarta is a maddening exercise. Traffic actually dictates ministry; discipling can only happen in communities that can be reached through the gridlock.

• **Fear.** Ethnic Chinese fear periodic attacks by indigenous Indonesians. Christians fear persecution from Muslims. Churches fear sharing the Gospel in Muslim areas. Muslim believers in Christ fear backlash from their families and communities.

"Fear has a very powerful grip in this city," Rick says.

• **Church tradition.** Most church growth, even in evangelical congregations, is biological or by transfer. Churches shy away from stepping out of their cultural-religious comfort zone.

## Looking back

### 10 years ago

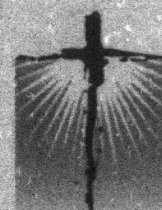
Jerry Mixon, pastor of Rocky Creek Church, Lucedale, and current president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, becomes the state's new stewardship Director after a unanimous vote of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board executive committee.

### 20 years ago

Judd R. Allen, consultant in the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Sunday School department, retires after 24 years. Allen began his work with the MBCB in 1965.

### 30 years ago

A record 7000 people, marked by large delegations of young people coming from every section of the state, are present for the closing youth rally of the Mississippi Baptist Convention at Hinds Memorial Stadium in Jackson.



MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS

## THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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YOU CAN RESPOND  
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



## BIBLIOCIPHER

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004  
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KOTMA TDC RATMA YA  
JSEQZREZAC SDQF NFS  
QBOFSKB QBA  
IDFGEACKA FX KFC,  
TDC FX LAWSW FSO  
EFOC.  
  
WAMFDC RAQAO FDA:  
QGF

Clue: K=G

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John Four: Thirty-Six

## CHRISTMAS DEFLATED

It was the week before Thanksgiving and I could not believe how many people were already getting ready to celebrate Christmas by putting up their decorations. I passed by one house that literally made me apply my brakes and slow down enough to see what I was actually looking at. It was about midday and all over this large yard, there were piles of plastic. There were over 20 of them spread out across the yard. I could not imagine what they were. As I looked more closely, I recognized that they were deflated plastic Christmas figures. I could not tell if it was a Santa, a reindeer, or trees. All I could tell because of the other Christmas decorations there was that this was probably a Christmas scene that would light up and come to life. At this point, they were deflated and unrecognizable.

As we approach Christmas 2009, we may be deflated ourselves or we may know of people whose spirits are deflated. I must confess that one of the saddest things in the world is to come to one of the most joyful highpoints of the year and be down, deflated, discouraged, and despondent. It makes Christmas and the holiday celebrations even more difficult for us to deal with. The reason the Christmas scene was deflated in that front yard was because the machines that blow the air in to fill up the images and cause them to stand up had been turned off. What can you do to deflate your Christmas?

First, I would suggest that you **remove** the true meaning of Christmas. It is certainly easy to do in our world. In fact, you cannot even use the word Christmas because it contains the word Christ, so we talk about Seasons Greetings and Holiday Cheer. Some go so far as to call it a Winter Festival. There are so many things that will divert our attention from God with us in the person of Jesus Christ, His wonderful

Son. Television programs of the season's specials will fill an hour or two that never mention the name Jesus or the significance of His coming to earth.

If you want to **deflate** Christmas and **remove** the true meaning of Christmas, remove the celebration of Immanuel, God with us. More and more it seems that the God of America has become pluralism. It is the kind of thought that there is no one supreme being above the others and no one way to God. There is no one truth as presented in God's Word, the Bible. We are just an amalgamation of ideas, a big melting pot of not only languages and ethnic groups, but also of cultures and religions, so the best thing for everybody to do is just kind of navigate through life and as you bump into some new religious idea, consider it, meditate on it, and if it fits you fine. If it doesn't, just keep on going. The reality remains unchanged. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the hope of all of the world. He is the only way to life everlasting.

Second, if you want to **deflate** Christmas and not only **remove** but **replace**. I suppose every one of us can do what I am about to suggest, and that is to fill our lives by focusing on all of our troubles. Many good things are happening around us. They are God things that we can be a part of and there are glorious things that we can celebrate. I promise you that anyone and everyone can choose to replace all of the grandeur of God's blessing to us and the glory of His presence with us with aches, pains, problems, and troubles.

I do not know of anyone who does not have some of life's dilemmas that they could not look at and say, "Oh me, why me, poor, pitiful me!" The list is

## Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer  
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

endless. It could be job related, health related, or relationship related. It could be kids, cats, or the cranky folks down the street, but there is something on which you can fix your attention and miss out on our grand God at work around us.

I am always amazed when I read and reread the Christmas story as told by Matthew and Luke. There are no verses or paragraphs where Mary and Joseph are complaining about having to make the long journey to Bethlehem, or bellyaching about the government and what is being imposed on them, or simply fretting about God's timing in their lives. Why could God not wait for a more convenient season for things to happen like they did? There were none of those things recorded but simply the gracious continuation of life to be where they needed to be, do what they needed to do, and see God working within them.

One last thought is that if you want to see Christmas deflated, simply **refuse**. The Christmas story is filled with

shepherds coming and wise men seeking, but there are also those folks who missed out on the whole experience. There was an innkeeper who must have told Joseph and Mary, "There is just no room here." They made their way out to the edge of town to a cattle stall. Herod heard about others searching for God's plan of His baby being born into this world, and just simply brushed it off by telling the wise men, "You go and find Him and let me know where He is."

Christmas is a very personal thing. Nobody else can fill it for you except the Lord Himself and you allowing Him to do it. You cannot depend on others to go find Him for you. He is as close as your next breath and as accessible as opening the door of your heart and letting Him come in. Still some refuse Him. They go on down the streets of life and participate in the events with a deflated Christmas experience. May that not be true for you. May you come to know the Lord, who could not only fill all of heaven with His glory but wrap this world and everyone in it in His grandeur.

Seek Him, bow to Him, and come to know His blessings from heaven.

To each of you I say, "Merry, Merry Christmas!"

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**SMITHVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH** is seeking a bi-vocational Student Minister. Please submit your resume and DVD to: Smithville Baptist Church R.O. Box 52 Smithville, MS 38870.

**CENTER RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH** located in the Carmichael community in Clarke County, MS is currently seeking a full time or bi-vocational pastor. Resumes may be sent to: Center Ridge Baptist Church c/o Beverly Lindsey 8067 CR 630, Shubuta, MS 39360, or email [beverly1@dishmail.net](mailto:beverly1@dishmail.net).

**PART-TIME SECRETARY FOR SMALL** church with financial secretary duties - 15 - 20 hours per week. Knowledge of Quickbooks is requested. Send resume to Pineview Baptist Church, 1288 Clinton-Raymond Rd., Clinton, MS 39056 - Attn: Personnel Committee or email it to [Pineviewbcb@bellsouth.net](mailto:Pineviewbcb@bellsouth.net).

**CORNERSTONE CHURCH NON-TRADITIONAL NEW CHURCH** start in Lamar county seeking bi-vocational teaching pastor to serve as part of two

person staff. MUST have passion to lead and reach the "hard to reach." Interim position available. Send resume to Pastor Search Team, 55 Beach Rd., Purvis, MS 39475, or email [BAWWilliamson@live.com](mailto:BAWWilliamson@live.com).

**GRACEWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH**, Southaven MS is seeking a full time Minister to Students. Gracewood is looking for someone with some experience working with youth and/or children, and some seminary. Send your resume to Gracewood Baptist Church, Search Committee, 8551 Getwell Road, Southaven, MS 38672.

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Loosahoma Baptist Church, C/O Music Minister Search Team, 808 Lyles Road, Senatobia, Ms. 38668.

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# 'Defenders of defenseless' in China now under attack

WASHINGTON (BP) — Religious freedom activists in China are not the only ones needing a lawyer. Their lawyers also are being attacked by the government.

"They are the defenders for the defenseless and a voice to the voiceless, and basically, for doing that, they themselves have been facing danger. The defenders themselves need defense, ironically," said Bob Fu, president of China Aid.

At a news conference in Washington, six Chinese legal rights professionals recounted their treatment by the Chinese government. One of the attorneys, Cao Zhi, founder and editor-in-chief of the Citizen Republic magazine in China, noted that a 2005 law enacted in China stipulates that if the government does not grant permission for a religious activity, it is considered illegal.

Dai Jinbo, a legal counsel for Chinese house churches, described a recent case that

involved a church that was attacked at 3 a.m. on Sept. 13 in northeastern China's Shanxi province. At least 300 police raided the Linfen House Church, physically beat a number of believers, and destroyed much of the church's property.

Zhang Kai, a defense attorney whose law license was revoked in May, cited some reasons Chinese officials persecute church members through beatings, imprisonments, or insults:

- If the church is not registered through the government.
- If the church does not ask permission to have religious activities.
- If the church evangelizes in other Chinese regions without government permission.

On Oct. 13, Christian leader Pastor Bike, as he is known, and his wife were on their way to visit Linfen

Church leaders who were arrested and being kept at a detention center. When they crossed the border into Shanxi province, police arrested Pastor Bike and jailed him, according to China Aid. The police later released the pastor and barred the couple from returning to Shanxi.

When a defense attorney handles such cases, said Li Fangping, a lawyer who has defended clients in more than 10 high-profile cases, "The government can refuse you, decline you, and even if they grant you the case, they can interfere with what you're doing in the process."

Jiang Tianyong, a human rights defense attorney whose law license also was revoked, said human rights activists can have a difficult time finding defense attorneys for their cases. "It is extremely hard for the lawyer to process. The lawyers will be followed by the policemen, harassed, or beaten physically. In court, we talk about the basic fact of these cases. We're not allowed to talk about constitutional human rights," Jiang said.

Despite the current conditions in China, the number of believers in the house movement church in Beijing is growing rapidly,

said Wang Guangze, a Chinese political and law expert and former international journalist for The New York Times.

However, Wang said Chinese media professionals are limited in reporting about religion in China and are required to release only positive reports. "We can see there is a very large religious community in China, but we don't see much about them in the media," Wang told reporters.

The USCIRF annual report, released in May, included recommendations for U.S. policy to support Chinese rights defenders through the State Department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund, including the creation of new programs with increased networking of non-governmental organizations in China that address issues of religious freedom and other rights.

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## Indian believer gives up wealthy lifestyle to win souls for Christ

NEW DELHI, India (BP) — As the sun sets in India, the ceremonial preparations subside. Chanting voices strengthen and join the rhythm of beating drums. Flames consume herbs and spices as golden incense burners pass among the Hindu worshippers. A marble goddess looms over the Ganges River, facing the crowds. Darkness — physical and spiritual — hovers over the multitudes.

In the midst of the worshippers is Moses, an Indian believer in Christ. He is not here to participate in rituals of the goddess worship. He is here to share the Gospel. "Brother, there is One who loves you and is greater than anything manmade. May I tell you about Him?" he asks the worshippers.

At age 17, Moses suffered from debilitating arthritis. Like many devout Hindus, he petitioned various gods and goddesses for help. As his condition worsened, he began to lose hope. One day a stranger handed him a Gospel tract and Moses began read-

ing about the Great Physician. He started attending church and soon put his faith in Jesus Christ. Fifteen days later, his arthritis was gone.

Years passed and Moses became a successful businessman. He continued to attend church, but God convicted him that he needed to do more. "The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, asking, 'Has Jesus healed you just to become a wealthy man?'" he recalls.

Leaving behind his comfortable lifestyle and incredulous parents, Moses journeyed with his wife and children to remote Himalayan villages in northern India to share the Gospel. He traded in business suits and power lunches for a life of poverty and servanthood.

Being a Christian in India can be dangerous. Persecution of believers throughout southern Asia is on the rise. Many believers suffer discrimination and even physical abuse. Moses understands the danger to his family as well as to himself, but something stronger compels him to take the risk.

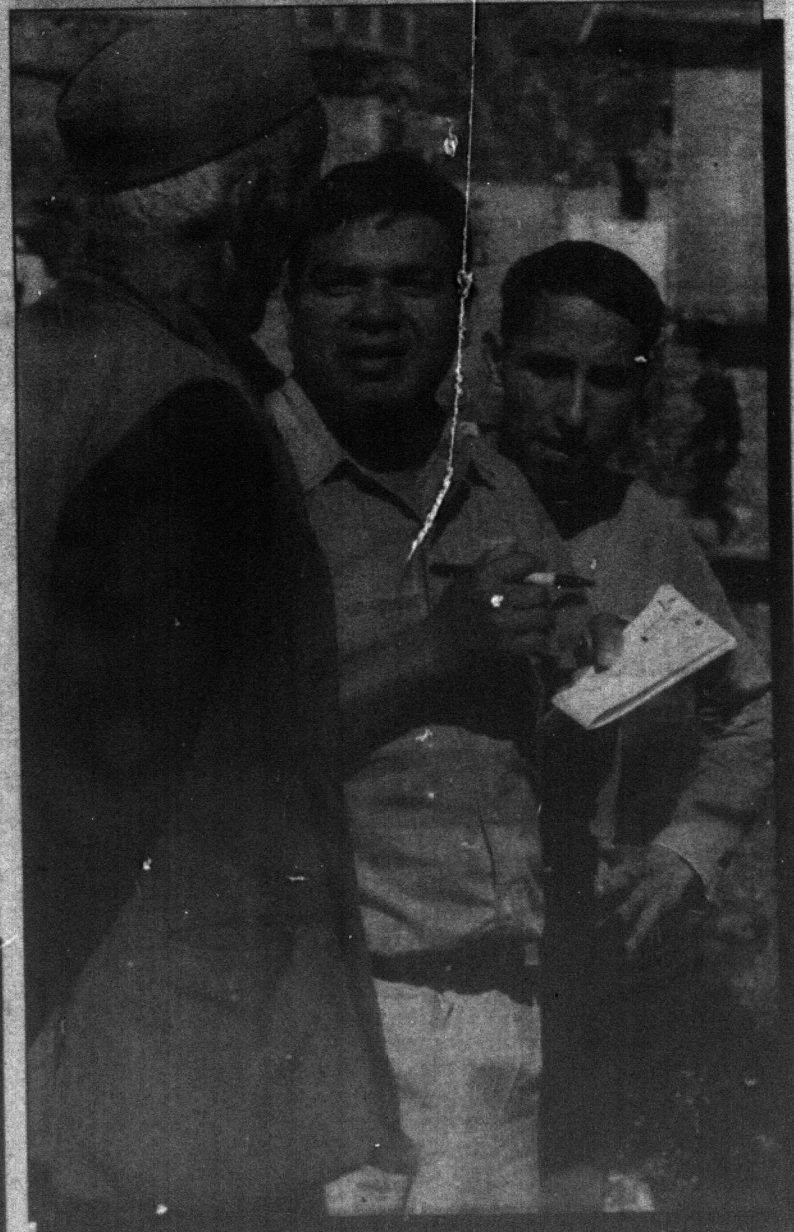
"My real fear is if these people do not hear the name of Jesus, they will go to hell," he says, in tears. "Then I have to answer for them before God."

Moses has been trained by Southern Baptist International Mission Board workers to use simple, hand-drawn pictures to share the Gospel, disciple believers, and start house churches. As he visits villages, he tells residents about the one true God who loves them.

In contrast to what most Hindus practice — worshipping idols out of fear or duty — the Gospel is truly Good News.

"God is moving," Moses says, "and whenever I'm visiting the villages, people are receiving the Gospel. People are coming to Jesus. [I] tell them you have to be bold in your faith. On the very first day, you have to start sharing the Gospel. You have to start sharing with people about what Jesus has done for you."

"In front of our God, in front of our calling and in front of our mission, the persecution doesn't matter. Time is short. I must go, pray, and preach the Gospel."



SHARING GOSPEL — Despite the daily threat of persecution, Moses (center) works alongside International Mission Board personnel using hand-drawn pictures to share the Gospel, disciple believers, and start house churches in the Himalayas of northern India. Moses gave up his upscale lifestyle in order to reach the unreached in the Himalaya Mountains. (BP photo)

WHO'S  
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5. Note burning, Academy Church, Tippah



6. Christ Church, Greenwood



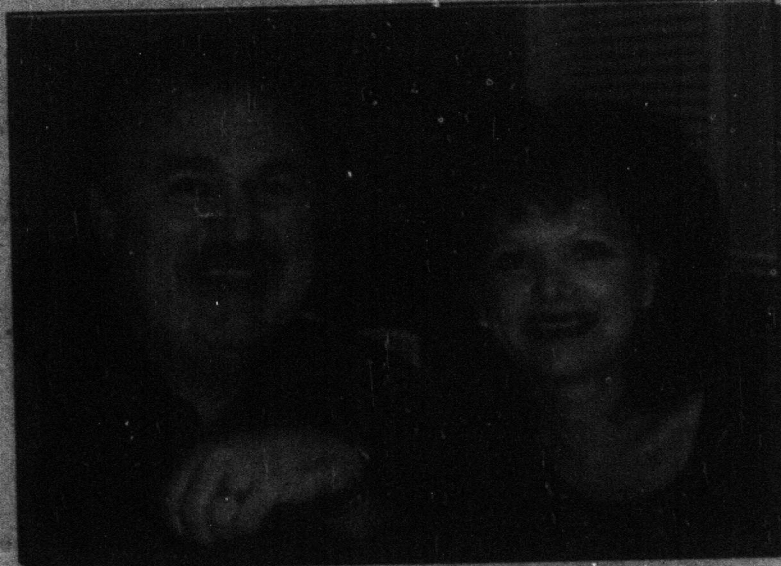
7. First Church, Verona



1. The RAs of Holcomb Church, Holcomb, will have a pancake breakfast Dec. 12, 7-11 a.m. Donations accepted at the door.
2. The worship team and praise band of Willow Pointe Church, Hattiesburg, will present The Gift of Love Dec. 13, 6 p.m. Call (601) 296-0555 for more information.
3. First Church, Laurel, will present A Gospel Christmas featuring Janet Paschal and the celebration choir Dec. 13, 4 p.m.
4. Calvary Church, Pricedale, is presenting Calvary's Night of Lights featuring free hayrides through the lights display and live Nativity scene, hot dogs, and hot chocolate. For more information, call (601) 684-3727.
5. Academy Church, Tippah, held a note burning on their sanctuary Nov. 22. Shown are the facility committee and pastor Earl Barron.
6. Christ Church, Greenwood, hosted a neighborhood day in the park Nov. 14, with hot dogs, church invitations, New Testaments, and religious themed toys being shared. Shown are some of the participants.
7. The youth of First Church, Verona, honored veterans



8. East licensing, Yellow Leaf Church, Oxford



9. Peavy recognition, Edna Church, Columbia

with a breakfast and special service Nov. 8. Shown are the participants.

8. Yellow Leaf Church, Oxford, has licensed Ben East to the ministry. Shown are Wesley Hughes, East, and pastor Jerry East.

9. Edna Church, Columbia, honored pastor Kenny Peavey and his wife Wanda with a meal in the fellowship hall upon his 26th anniversary as pastor. Shown are the Peaveys.

OBITUARY

1. James T. Dunnam passed away Nov. 16, at Forrest General Hospital, Hattiesburg. Dunnam was a graduate of Pascagoula High School, Clarke Memorial College, Mississippi College, and New Orleans Seminary. He held several student part-time pastorates in Mississippi during college and seminary days, and spent 44 years in full-time pastorates in Florida. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Betty Sue (Holt) Dunnam; children Susan C. Raines, Jamie S. Johnson, and James T. Dunnam; three sisters; and four granddaughters. Services were Nov. 20 at First Church, Leakesville, with interment was at Fellowship Cemetery, Old Avera Road.

COLLEGE NEWS

1. The William Carey Theater will present Dancin' on the Wind by Hattiesburg writer Belinda Jo "B.J." Mathias Dec. 10 and 12, 7 p.m., and Dec. 12, 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Reservations may be made by telephone at (601) 318-6221. The box office will be open daily, 1-4 p.m. All seats \$5.

WHO'S MISSING?





# Lezghi present difficult ministry for missionary couple

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Carl Stroller (name changed for security reasons) doesn't drink vodka, but his ministry might not be the same without it.

Stroller and his wife Amy (name changed for security reasons) are Southern Baptist missionaries who left their hometown in North Carolina 10 years ago to share the Gospel with a Muslim people known as the Lezghi (pronounced lez-gee).

More than 600,000 Lezghi live among the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus Mountains, located between the Black and Caspian seas. Most are poor by Western standards, surviving as farmers or shepherds.

Though their culture is Islamic, the Lezghis' belief in God is deeply rooted in animism (spirit worship). Many have heard Jesus' name but know Him only as a good man who did good things.

In rocky soil like this, Stroller says sharing the truth about Christ requires patience to build strong relationships. When he's not involved with community development projects like teaching English, much of Stroller's time is spent talking about God with a bottle of vodka not far away.

Alcohol, like animism, is tightly woven into Lezghi society. Sharing a drink with a neighbor, friend, or co-worker is an everyday event — at meals, on the job, after work. Russian influence has made vodka the Lezghis' liquor of choice, not to mention the fuel that fires rampant alcoholism.

The Lezghis' desire to drink does have a single redeeming value: it presents Stroller with the chance to explain why he doesn't. "To decline drink is always an odd response for them," Stroller says. "They can't believe that somebody wouldn't want to drink, but it often leads to an opportunity to... share your testimony and what the Lord has done in your life."

"The funniest thing is what they consider to be alcoholic and non-alcoholic. I'll decline vodka... and they'll bring beer or wine. Then it's back to my testimony of why I don't drink. If I don't have an opportunity to share... it's because I didn't take the opportunity."

Opportunity doesn't necessarily indicate openness to the Gospel, however, and sharing is no guarantee of salvation.

Despite a decade of work among

the Lezghi, the Strollers can't confidently say they've led a single person to saving faith in Christ. It's been a difficult journey, filled with hardship, bitter disappointment, and even betrayal.

"Initially we thought that these people only needed to hear the Gospel and then they would start coming to faith. We never anticipated them being so obstinate to the Good News," Stroller says. "Though spiritually minded, they don't typically express much interest in the Gospel. Their eyes have truly been blinded."

Stroller recalls sharing the Gospel with a young Lezghi man who appeared to accept Christ but later began asking about the "benefits" of being saved. Stroller eventually discovered that the young man's conversion was motivated by a TV news story about churches that were allegedly bribing people to become Christians.

Once the man realized his profession of faith wasn't going to pay, he renounced Jesus and ended his contact with Stroller.

Amy tells of a similar experience. Several years ago she shared Christ with a Lezghi woman who was married to an abusive alcoholic husband. Amy, along with several local believers, tried to help the woman. She claimed to accept Christ and even went so far as to be baptized but Amy soon realized the woman was using them, lying to the church, and borrowing money she had no intention of repaying.

"All the other neighbors that I had evangelized in the past had heard that this woman had become a Christian," Amy says. "They thought she was an accurate model of a believer, and they

wanted nothing to do with Jesus. She gave them reason to reject Christ."

Situations like these don't tell the whole story, though. God has blessed the Strollers with some successes among the Lezghi, including starting a small house church that's grown from a group of five to 15 people. Persecution has since forced the church to split in half to attract less attention, but it continues to grow in spite of the Lezghis' coldness to the Gospel.

"How do we overcome [hardship]?" By remaining faithful to the task," Stroller says. "We remain obedient to the command of our Lord to make disciples of all nations. We believe He meant the Lezghi people when He gave that command. That's why we are here."



**IN NEED OF GOSPEL** — Most of the Lezghi people of the Caucasus Mountains, like this unidentified herder, survive as farmers or shepherds, growing what they need to eat and selling anything left over. "Hearing the Gospel for the first time is odd for the Lezghi," says overseas worker Carl Stroller (name changed for security reasons). "Most people spend months or even years contemplating the Gospel before they believe." (BP photo)

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## Health alert: Seniors should be taking precautions to avoid flu

By Mary Jean Padgett  
Correspondent

It is that time of the year for the dreaded flu to invade once again. As a senior citizen, you may be especially vulnerable for complications should you get sick with the flu. Here are helpful hints to stay well this year.

- **Get your flu vaccine.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends flu vaccine to protect against influenza, and that is especially important for people ages 65 years and older. There are two different kinds of flu this year, so you want to protect against both seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu.



Padgett

- **Know the symptoms.** Common flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and/or diarrhea and vomiting. Check with your

health care provider as soon as you feel "sick" or notice these symptoms.

Senior adults sometimes respond differently to diseases, and not everyone with the flu will have a fever or specific other symptoms.

You do not have to have all of these symptoms in order to be ill with the flu. Serious respiratory complications can happen when mild symptoms are left untreated; and many can be avoided with early treatment.

- **Take preventive actions.** The easiest way to prevent spread of flu is to wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based

hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, as germs are spread this way. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it, or sneeze into your elbow rather than your hands when possible. Try to avoid close contact with sick people, and avoid touching items that sick people have touched.

If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.

- **Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.** If you get sick with the flu, antiviral drugs can make the illness milder, shorten the time you are sick, and may also prevent serious flu complications.

Antiviral drugs work best if started within the first two days of symptoms, so call your health care provider as soon as you notice symptoms or feel sick.

Padgett, a registered nurse, is dean and professor at the Mississippi College School of Nursing in Clinton. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information, check with your health care provider, and/or visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).



# WorldCrafts helps shape new life for poor women

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP) — Lives are being turned from darkness to light in more than 30 countries through WorldCrafts, an ongoing artisan ministry coordinated by Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) of the Southern Baptist Convention.

As the gift-giving season approaches, WMU encourages Southern Baptists to consider WorldCrafts to support a ministry that has helped thousands of neglected women embrace fulfilling careers as artisans.

"WorldCrafts is about more than social good. WorldCrafts is concerned with transformed lives, homes and communities," said Andrea Mullins, director of WorldCrafts. "With each and every gift purchase, you are helping artisans across the world escape poverty and discover a living hope."

WorldCrafts pays artisans a fair price that covers not only their costs but also ensures sustainable production, Mullins said. WMU encourages artisans to set prices that allow them to invest in the growth of their business.

"We provide partial advance on payments to the artisans that allows them to hire more people and purchase the raw materials needed," Mullins said. "We are committed to our artisans for the long term to maintain certain levels of product orders, investing in product development for long-term planning as well as sustainable production practices. These standards guarantee impoverished families hope for a better life."

In three vignettes this fall, WMU has featured three women whose lives that were

changed through WorldCrafts, providing snapshots of the success of the artisan endeavors. WorldCrafts' Set1Free campaign highlights various artisan groups working to end sexual exploitation and human trafficking among the world's poor.

In India, women and children who live in poverty are at risk of being trapped in the country's sex trade industry, facing lives where they are denied some of the most basic freedoms.

WMU featured Menaka, a woman who 30 years ago was a 13-year-old girl in a refugee camp, a victim of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Disgusted by the conditions of the camp, Menaka sought a better life by escaping to Calcutta, where she thought she could get a job as a housemaid.

Instead of landing the job she expected, Menaka found herself sold to a brothel for \$20. Her first customer drugged her and raped her as she tried again to escape.

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In 2001, after years in bondage, Menaka became one of the original 20 employees of an artisan business called Freeset, which is a WMU partner. Now Menaka sews high-quality

jute bags, available for purchase through WorldCrafts.

Freeset employs women on the basis of their need for freedom rather than the skills they have to offer. A woman must be in the sex trade or be the daughter of a woman in the trade to qualify for a job at the business, located in a red-light district.

The women are trained, paid a fair wage, taught to read

and write, and signed up for health insurance and a pension fund. WMU said a milestone for each employee is reached when she is able to sign her own name for her paycheck.

A few years ago, Menaka journeyed home to find her mother, and the two were reunited. Now she wants to see as many women as possible set free from the bondage of prostitution, WMU said.

Another story comes from Nepal, where Sara and Cara were teenagers working in a dance bar, being sexually exploited by the customers. Bimala, founder of an artisan business called Higher Ground, approached them two years ago and offered them the opportunity to trade that lifestyle in for training and salaried jobs making jewelry.

Cara accepted the offer two weeks later and now follows Christ as a 19-year-old high school-educated artisan. Sara opted to remain at the dance bar and try to raise her infant son on the minimal wages she received, but recently she contacted Cara about joining her as an artisan, WMU said.

Now age 21, Sara is working at Higher Ground with a good salary and a scholarship for her son. She also is learning how to manage her time and money and care for her child. Her story, though, does include a period when she considered going back to the dance bar for more money. Higher Ground counseled her against that option but allowed her to choose whether to remain an artisan or return to her previous lifestyle. She decided to stay and has renounced her previous job.

WMU also highlighted Jo, a woman in Thailand who recounted her story firsthand. She had a husband and chil-



**SET FREE** — Victims of Nepal's sex trade industry have sought refuge at a ministry called Higher Ground, where they now have salaried jobs making jewelry available for purchase from WorldCrafts, a ministry of the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptists who patronize WorldCrafts are helping women around the world free themselves from the grip of sin. (BP photo courtesy of WorldCrafts)

dren but bought a house in order to gain approval from her friends. She and her husband ran into overwhelming debt as they tried to construct the house, and he left to work abroad for three years.

The geographical distance between the couple caused their marriage to deteriorate, and infidelity eventually wrecked both of their lives.

Jo found herself in Thailand's sex industry, living with people who were hooked on drugs. She recounted walking along the beach looking for a Buddha idol to pray with because she had no hope left in life.

As she was working in a bar in Bangkok, some people from an artisan business named The Well came in to tell her about

the opportunities available to her. She quit her job at the bar and now makes traditional Thai textiles and jewelry.

"I started following Jesus and repented from my past," Jo said.

WMU encourages American women to host a WorldCrafts party featuring samples of artisans' goods as instructed on the WorldCrafts website, worldcraftsvillage.com.

Also, pray for the artisans and consider donating to the endowment that helps make the ministry possible.

Obviously, another way to help is to shop. WMU recommends browsing through the items on the website or in the catalog, available by calling (800) 968-7301, and remembering WorldCrafts for gift-giving occasions.

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# Impure worship clouds effort to reach many Ethiopians

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — At first glance, it doesn't look like a cross. Diamond-shaped with a handle, the cross itself is obscured beneath decoration and ornate carvings.

Religious leaders carry these crosses as they guide more than 42 million Ethiopians each week in praying, singing, and memorizing Scripture. This may not sound that different from many churches in the United States — but look closer.

Behind the rituals is a religion built on the worship of saints, angels, and even demons. Most Ethiopians consider themselves Christians because their religion includes biblical teachings and an understanding of Jesus, except that He is but one of many gods in their mixture of religions. They believe more than a dozen paths lead to heaven.

Their religion is similar to the diamond-shaped cross, says Ed (name changed for security reasons), a Southern Baptist International Mission Board worker who has shared the Gospel among these Ethiopian people for more than a decade. "They've added so much deco-

ration and embellishment to [their religion] that the cross is no longer visible," he says.

Haffa (name changed for security reasons), a local believer, knows how buried the Gospel can become. He formerly was a holy man who practiced white and black magic to heal and curse. He gave out amulets to ward off evil spirits. He also studied Scripture and prayed to Jesus.

One day a man told Haffa that Christ is the only way to heaven. Haffa learned that his efforts to appease a variety of gods were in vain. He spoke with the man several times before deciding to put his trust solely in Christ. Then he set fire to his books of magic.

With a population of more than 82 million, Ethiopia is less than one percent evangelical. Most people do not understand the rituals and prayers they participate in, says Gabriel (name changed for security reasons), another local believer. They worship, sing, and hear sermons delivered in an ancient language they do not understand. More than 90% are illiterate, enabling some religious leaders to manipulate the Gospel.

For many Ethiopians, their religious beliefs are simply cultural. "Having culture is good, but if it's without God, it is pointless," Gabriel says, but today many Ethiopians are becoming more receptive to God's truth — with limitations.

Ed and his wife Renee (names changed for security reasons) have found that most of their people group are open to talking about spiritual matters. They are resistant, however, to outside influences that



**HOPING FOR FAVOR** — A child kisses a cross during a service in Ethiopia honoring the Virgin Mary. The girl hopes to gain favor with the saints so she can go to heaven. Ethiopian religion adopts the worship of saints, angels, and even demons. (BP photo)

attempt to pull them away from their own beliefs.

Renee remembers a man years ago asking her why she and her husband had come to the country. She told him she was there to tell others about Jesus. "If they think you are there to change their religion, they'll shut down on you in a heartbeat," Renee said. "[They think,] 'Why in the world would some foreigner think they could come to Ethiopia to teach anybody about Jesus?'"

These days, Renee and Ed apply a careful approach they

call alongside evangelism. "We say, 'Oh, you're a Christian, too?'" she says. "How do you express your faith?" In time, the couple share more and more about Jesus Christ and how He has impacted their lives.

"We just continually point to the cross," Ed says. Eventually, lives are transformed. "You'll have them come to you with a list of all the names of their family members, and they'll say... 'I want you praying about these people,'" Renee says.

Turning from the ways of their old religion, however,

often leads to persecution. "Suppose you get hurt, and it's harvest time, and your family members — the people in your community — have isolated you and labeled you a heretic? What are you going to do?" Renee asks. "That means your kids starve. There are real life-and-death situations that people have to decide about."

Despite pressures not to believe, the truth through the story of Jesus is right in front of their eyes, Renee says. "The story is from one of their own holy books — the Bible."

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## First Person: For followers of Jesus, Christmas is already done

By Terri Cowart  
Correspondent

When our son Logan was just a baby (he is now 21) and our girls Morgan was five (she is now 26) and Audrey was four (she is now 25), I found myself very stressed about Christmas in general.

It was our first Christmas in Mississippi since my husband's new job had brought us here. Money was an issue and just planning how we would get home to East Texas to see our



Cowart

family for both Thanksgiving and Christmas was a challenge. By now I had come to dislike the Christmas season as a general rule because for years we really couldn't afford to do a lot and it was not much fun.

At this time, I had decided to attend this Bible study called Explorers Bible Study at a local church here. They had a nursery where they also had lessons about God for the children, so Logan went with me while the girls were in school. Every week I would

get homework, and Logan would get these little lessons that I would read to him about God that would be both for the parents and the children.

On the last meeting before Christmas, he got one more lesson. That day I had particularly been worried and fretting about how to do Christmas. As I read his little lesson, it talked about not worrying about the gifts, the decorations, the parties, or anything. It said, "Christmas is already done."

With those simple words, I let it all go. The real Christmas has already happened over 2000 years ago, because Jesus already came. I rejoiced in that. Being reminded of that in a fresh way made my first Christmas here better than it would have been otherwise.

Right now my grandson Liam, who is four months old, is asleep in the other room. Since I have been keeping him while his parents are working, I haven't gotten much done in

general around the house. As far as the Christmas stuff goes, I have achieved even less. I barely get the laundry and cleaning done on a good day. So the lights are not hung, nor are half the stockings. I can't find my wreath with snowmen on it. My famous pumpkin bread cake I made yesterday fell, and I can't seem to decorate the mantels to look like those magazine pictures.

Today, however, I was reminded of that little lesson that I got 21 years ago. Christmas is already done. No need to redo it or worry about the things to add to it. Just enjoy Jesus. He already came and took care of everything for us all.

"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, He went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll

and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' and he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Mark 4: 18-19)

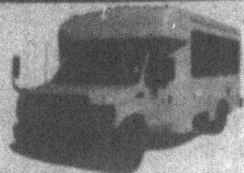
Our wish for you is His peace this Christmas. May you remember that Christmas is already done, and just rejoice in Him.

"Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David." (Luke 2:11)

Merry Christmas!

Cowart resides in Brandon and is a member of First Church, Brandon.

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# THE VILLAGE VIEW



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## GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals help to pay tribute to others through this publication. The gifts of honor and memory are a wonderful way to show appreciation and love for someone special.

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## BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Joy to the World!

Luke 1:46-56

By Barbara Brown

*Joy to the World, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the World, the Savior  
reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills  
and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy.*

Joy – it's the theme of the Christmas season especially for those grateful that a Savior was born to take away the sins of the world. Joy to the World was originally penned by Isaac Watts as he sought to compose a song for each of the psalms. This popular hymn paraphrases parts of Psalm 98 which was written by David as a jubilant song of praise and rejoicing for the Lord's faithfulness to His people and

the salvation He provided. "This psalm anticipates the time when Jehovah will be the God of the whole earth and Israel's law will be accepted by all of the nations. Watts, however, has given the verses a fresh interpretation – a New Testament expression of praise for the salvation that began when God became incarnate as the Babe of Bethlehem and was destined to remove the curse of Adam's fall." (101 Hymn Stories by Kenneth Osbeck).

This same joy, praise, and gratitude is reflected in the words sung by Mary, and recorded by Luke, as she looked forward to the birth of our Lord.

## Mary's Magnificat

Mary, a young unmarried girl of 13 or 14 years, has just received the news that she is going to have a baby boy –

and not just any boy, but the Messiah, the hope of her people. She receives the news with a calm confidence that God knows exactly what He is doing. Counting on the Lord's protection and provision, she journeys to the home of her cousin Elizabeth. At the very sight of Mary, Elizabeth confirms the glorious miracle within her and offers her blessing. Mary's response is one of great joy – not the temporary kind of joy that fizzles once the fun has worn off and everyone is gone; but the deep, heart-felt, peace-giving kind of joy that comes from a certainty that all is well even though it may look otherwise. Her song of rejoicing (v.46-55) includes several elements that must be a part of the lives of all who would know that same joy.

## Mary knew the Word

Mary's heart and head were filled with scripture and she sang them back to God. Because she knew the Word,

she was expecting a Messiah – maybe not this way – but she understood that the Lord had a plan. Understanding that plan and trusting the Word that she knew added to her strength and provided the basis of her joy. (For examples, see Psalms 18:46, 34:2-3, 98:1, 107:9; Exodus 18:11, 20:6)

## Mary worshipped

One can almost hear the crescendo in Mary's song as she names many of the attributes of God – Savior, Mighty One, merciful, provider, helper, promise-keeper. As she names them, she is not only recalling the past kindnesses of God, but also claiming them as her own. This is a song of pure worship from the heart of one who recognized the work of the Lord.

## Mary received God's Word with humility

Mary knew that she was a small part of something much larger than herself. She was a tiny piece in a puzzle that would change the world. With great humility, she submitted gracefully and obediently to God's will, thus giving up any plans of her own. Mary was happy to be His servant. She

knew that the eternal destiny of generations to come would be affected by her acceptance of His plan.

## Mary was grateful

Despite the precarious, even dangerous, position in which she found herself, Mary's song exudes gratitude born of the calm assurance that God would care for her and act in her behalf.

## Mary was hopeful

Looking forward to more than the birth of a baby, Mary envisioned the hopes of her people being fulfilled as, through the birth of His Son, God completed the covenant He had made to Abraham. She was about to see the powerful hand of the Almighty God move in behalf of all people everywhere.

We are not Mary, but we each have our own Magnificat to sing as we worship and serve the Living Word with humility and gratitude. So with great hope and confidence, let us also rejoice in "... the wonders of His love."

*Brown is children's minister,  
Colonial Heights Church, Ridgeland.*

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## What Does Jesus' Call Mean for Me?

Mark 2:15-28

By Malcolm Woody

As we did with last week's lesson, grab your sandals and let's go back to the first century. Before today's focal passage we discover Jesus walking along Galilee as a throng of people clamor after Him. The crowd is greatly mixed. Some are there for healing, some for truth, some are looking with a critical eye to report back what they see. Others are following the circus-like atmosphere.

What will He do next? Who will be healed? What demon will be expelled? What majestic truth will He tell? What sign will they see? These questions stir amid the marvel of the scene, and expectancy is thick in the air.

Along the heavily traveled road from Damascus through

Capernaum there is a tax collector's office. Sitting in the office is a man named Levi. While Jesus walks along near the shore and the road, He looks up and says to Levi, "Follow Me." (Mark 2:14 HCSB).

The crowd grows silent. All eyes are on Levi and Jesus. Then Levi gets up from his desk and exits the booth to follow Jesus. He leaves his tax collecting behind and wholly answers the call of Jesus. There are grumblings in the crowd concerning what they see. Jewish tax collectors such as Levi are considered nothing more than traitors and collaborators with Rome. They are not welcome in synagogue, can't testify as a witness, and can't hold any judiciary office. They are

allowed to misappropriate collections to support themselves without regulation. Rome looks the other way as long as they get what they require.

As a new follower of Jesus, Levi stages a banquet in His honor. So, Levi invites all his friends. Who are they? They are outcasts just like Levi. They are other people of ill repute, "sinners" as the Pharisees so amply call them. Jesus thinks nothing of joining Levi and his friends for a meal as others look on repulsed. Some of those Pharisees ask the followers of Christ, "Why does He (Jesus) eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Mark 2:16 (HCSB)

Let's allow that question to hang a moment and consider that throughout the Gospels Jesus exhibits an easiness with sinners and they with Him. How is this possible? How is Someone with the high standards of the Sermon on the Mount able to stoop to eat with the wretched sinner? The answer is twofold.

First, everyone is a sinner when held to the absolute perfect standard of God. Second, Jesus came to introduce the world to grace not judgment. The Pharisees, though apostate, were adequate at judgment, but grace was new and on many levels the church today has the same struggle. The fact that Jesus would dine with anyone was an act of grace. Furthermore, He could do it without compromise. John said He was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). The real version of each, whether grace or truth, is a full measure of both. Otherwise you have neither. Jesus lived this and calls us to do the same.

I imagine a hush falling over the banquet as Levi and his friends are rushed back to the reality of their standing in society. They are outcasts again.

However, with one sweeping statement Jesus quells the scene with a full measure of both grace and truth by saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous,

but sinners." (Mark 2:17 NIV) None of the Gospel accounts record a response to this statement. The truth of these words, wrapped in the pure grace of His action, personifies who Jesus is and why He came. "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46 NIV), a guard would one day report to the Pharisees. How true.

Our response to Christ's call should not be trying to put the new wine of the new covenant in old wineskins. In Cana at a wedding (John 2:1-12) Jesus would use the ceremonial washing jars that could never bring you clean before God and filled them with the new wine symbolic of His blood which can bring us clean before a Holy God. A man named Levi did just that and the old man, Levi, became Matthew. Matthew means "gift of the Lord", and he never got over the "Gift".

Like Matthew, embrace both Christ's grace and His truth and dispense it to the world.

*Woody is a member of  
Broadmoor Church, Madison.*

## Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either: (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

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Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.



# MKs get taste for witnessing during Tokyo visit

TOKYO (BP) — "Five-minute English! Five-minute English! Do you want to practice your English?" a college intern asked outside a busy Tokyo subway station as 27 teenage missionary kids (MKs) — sons and daughters of Southern Baptist missionaries — looked on.

As several college missions interns modeled how to lead into a Gospel presentation while offering free English lessons, a Japanese woman stopped and watched. One of the MKs began talking to her and, within 30 minutes, the woman gave her life to Christ.

"I started talking about Jesus, and she immediately said she had done too many bad things," said Barbara Coffman (name changed for security reasons), age 15, who lives in the Philippines. "She said she had a problem with drugs. Then she pulled back her sleeves where her arms had all these marks where she'd cut herself, and she lowered her head and said she just wanted to die."

Coffman and the Japanese woman were both crying by this point. "I just explained that everyone sins, and because of sin we have separation from God, and this causes hopelessness and depression," Coffman recounted, "but there is no sin too great that God can't forgive. She said she believed in Jesus, and then she asked forgiveness for her sins and read the prayer I had [about salvation], and she told the interns that she prayed from the heart in Japanese."

This was only the first day of Expedition 2009, a weeklong missions experience for 15- and 16-year-old MKs whose families serve in southern Asia through the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. This was the fourth Expedition since the missions program began in the summer of 2003.

## Outside comfort zone

"This is an opportunity for high schoolers to be involved in the main thing outside of their comfort zone and separate from their parents," said Gillian Laswell (name changed for security reasons), a third-culture kid (TCK) consultant serving in Asia who helped organize the trip. "The unique factor unlike a church youth group trip is that eight countries are represented on the team."

Like an American youth group preparing for a mission trip, the 27 rising high school sophomores and juniors raised their own funds to go to Tokyo and underwent an application process. In addition, they had homework assignments to learn about Japan and its culture. Each family also had to arrange air transportation to Japan.

Tokyo, capital of one of the world's wealthiest countries, has a population of 33 million who are overwhelmingly Shinto and Buddhist; less than one percent of the population profess to be Christian. These statistics are similar to the countries where some of the MKs live, with one difference: "Japan is not a closed

country," said Bill Botswick (name changed for security reasons), who serves as projects coordinator and volunteer mobilizer for the IMB Tokyo organization. "You can feel free to share Jesus all you want."

Ben Glass (name changed for security reasons), an MK from Thailand, said a mission trip to a country like Japan "sounded kind of strange because there's this whole view of going to some place that is less well off, but I think that's probably the wrong mindset to have, because God can use me anywhere. All I have to do is just let Him take my every breath and every heartbeat and be prepared for whatever He throws my way."

In five-minute English, the teenagers would offer a free English lesson sponsored by IMB Tokyo. Using written questions, the teenager and the Japanese person would discuss favorite films and music, and then favorite books, so that the student could begin talking about the Bible and sharing a testimony and Gospel presentation. Then the teen would offer a Gospel of John and an order form for a Japanese DVD that goes through the Bible in a series of stories.

Wanda Harris (name changed for security reasons) said she used her knowledge of Buddhism from growing up as an MK in Thailand to talk to one Japanese man.

"I told one man the Buddhist parable that says sin is sin and good is good, and good cannot erase sin," Harris said, "so Buddhists make merit to the Buddha to erase sin, but even Buddha teaches that it won't help them. It was really hard for this man to respond to that."

## Pressure to conform

Though missionaries have been in Japan for more than a century, Christians have found the Japanese resistant because of a cultural pressure toward conformity.

"At the same time, there is an absence of standards," said Gladys Warren (name changed for security reasons), an IMB missionary journeyman. "People here really don't have moral standards outside what the group says is OK."

Sandy Tockey (name changed for security reasons), whose family serves in Southeast Asia, said she met two girls, one of whom previously had attended a Bible study.

"She stopped going because she didn't think it was really important," Tockey said. "We started talking about heaven and hell, and she began to consider about Jesus being able to save her, but her friend said it wasn't important so they decided to leave. I really felt sad because she was interested and her friend wasn't."

Many of the students said they sensed the Japanese deal with depression and purposelessness despite living in an affluent society. Theo Radford



**QUICK ENGLISH LESSON** — A Southern Baptist missionary kid (right) from Thailand talks with young Japanese students outside a Tokyo subway station, offering them a free English lesson as a way to share the Gospel. Brewster was one of 27 Expedition 2009 participants. (BP photo)

(name changed for security reasons), whose family serves in southern Asia, said he noticed this even in advertisements.

"I saw a commercial that said if you drink Coke, you will be happy," Radford said. "Coke is trying to reach them by making everybody look happy on their advertisements, and we're trying to reach them with the Gospel so we can give them the joy of Christ. Depression is a big thing in the lives of the Japanese."

Tim Sorenson (name changed for security reasons), an MK from Thailand, said one Japanese man confirmed this. "The tract asks if you have ever felt saddened and depressed," Sorenson said, "and the guy I was talking to said, 'Yeah. Who doesn't?' It was kind of sad and eye-opening for me. For them, who hasn't?"

## Power of prayer

Jerry Jones (name changed for security reasons), whose family serves in Southeast Asia, said he gained a deeper understanding of the power of prayer. "Some of our team members would be doing five-minute English and not many people would be stopping for them," Jones said, "and then we'd go prayerwalking and by the time we got back to that area, everyone would have someone to talk to."

Along with offering free English lessons, the teenagers prayerwalked around the city and even prayed on the grounds of the Buddhist Asakasa Temple.

"We went into the temple, and it was so apparent that God was not in that place, and we both started feeling sick," said Janie Carlos (name changed for security reasons). "We felt a battle going on."

Carlos and some of the other students said they prayed and read Scripture while walking around the temple. "We started reading Psalms," Barbara Coffman said. "It was really great to read it out loud in the temple. We were grinning afterward."

Bobbie Coffman (name changed for security reasons), Barbara's sister, said she noticed one Japanese woman there interacting with her granddaughter. "This young girl was touching everything and grabbing things and picking up the candles," she said. "Her grandmother came and showed her where to put the candles and where to go to the statue, how to sit down and fold her hands, and how to pray."

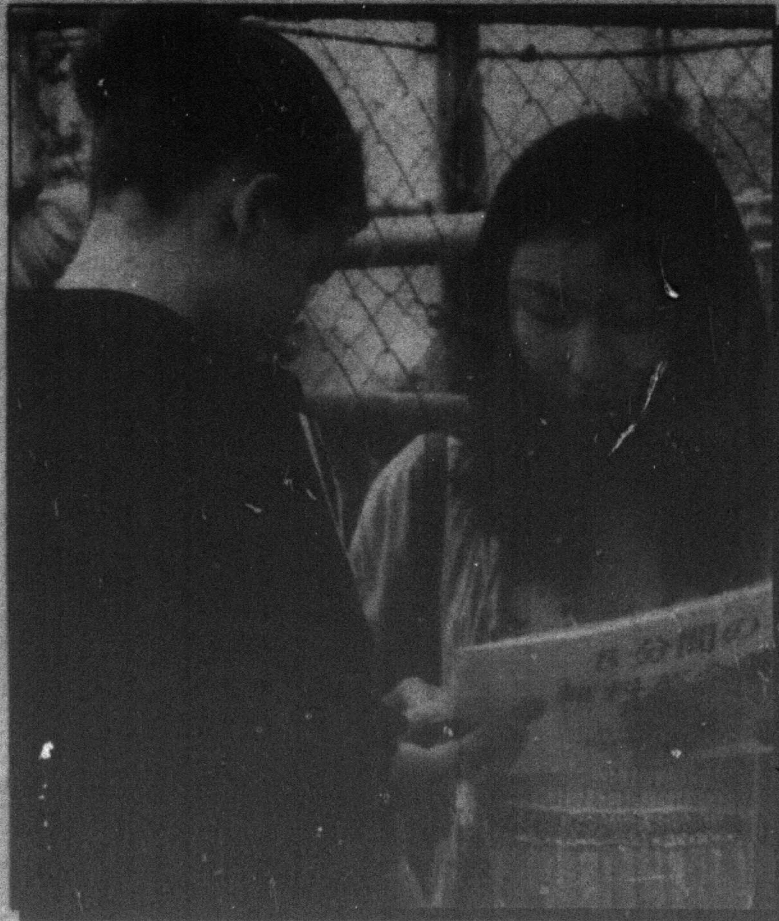
"Her grandma was doing her best to teach her granddaughter to be a good person... Through generations, the Japanese will continue in the same beliefs that they've always had and won't change unless someone comes and tells them."

## Powerful skit

Raleigh Kinder (name changed for security reasons), whose family serves in southern Asia, said a skit the MKs performed in a park — addressing suicide, depression, and addictions, along with the freedom of Christ — powerfully communicated to onlookers.

"As I looked into the faces of the people watching the skit, especially at the suicide part, I saw a lot of recognition and a lot of emptiness and sadness," said Kinder, age 16, who also was on the Expedition trip last year in Southeast Asia. "After the skit, I didn't get to speak to anyone who watched it, because I'm happy to say that they were already speaking with a lot of our students. I felt that it really made an opening into their hearts."

Zoe Kirker (name changed for security reasons), whose family serves in southern Asia, said the trip to Tokyo exceeded her expectations. "I didn't think we would be able to do that much good. It's not like we wouldn't have been trying at all, but where I live, we haven't seen a convert yet. I didn't think we would actually get to share with that many people."



**AN OPENING** — A missionary kid (left) whose parents serve among south Asian peoples gives a young Japanese woman a five-minute English lesson that includes an introduction to the Gospel. The young woman was among 27 missionary kids venturing to Tokyo for Expedition 2009. (BP photo)